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AUTHOR Markowitz, Joy
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ABSTRACT

In order to help formulate the research questions for a future study on the long-term outcomes of students with disabilities, this study collected information from eight states concerning their priorities for longitudinal research on students who received special education services under the age of 5 years. State directors of special education in the eight states were asked to rank nine proposed areas of research, including: (1) rate of retention; (2) home language and economic situation; (3) changes in disability classification over time, including de-classification; (4) rates of suspension and expulsion; (5) rate of graduation; (6) postsecondary status; (7) family satisfaction with preschool services/special education support; (8) mobility rate; and (9) provision of English as a second language services during elementary and secondary years. The high school graduation rate of students who received special education services under the age of 5 was the long-term outcome of most interest to states; mobility rate of these students was of least interest. Three state representatives added that they would be interested in achievement data in reference to the general education curriculum. (Author/CR)

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LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH ON CHILDREN WHO RECEIVED EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES:

THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

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by Joy Markowitz, Ed.D.

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Prepared by:
Project FORUM
Eileen M. Ahearn, Ph.D., Director

National Association of State Directors of Special Education
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314

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Abstract

In response to the growing need for data on the outcomes of early intervention and preschool special education, Project FORUM and the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC*TAS) at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) collected information from eight states regarding their priorities for longitudinal research on students who received special education services under the age of five years. Several states were included that had served children with disabilities under the age of five years since the 1970's. State directors of special education, or their designee, were presented with nine areas of proposed research inquiry and asked to indicate the areas of interest to their state. The research areas included: rate of retention, home language and economic status, changes in disability classification, rates of suspension and expulsion, graduation rate, post-secondary status, family satisfaction with services, mobility rate, and provision of ESOL/ESL services. The one area of interest to all states was graduation rate. The area of least interest (five states) was mobility rate. Three state representatives indicated that their states would also be interested in achievement data, in reference to the general education curriculum, on students who received special education services under the age of five years.

LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH ON CHILDREN WHO RECEIVED EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES: THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

Background

In 1975, with the passage of P.L. 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), all children with disabilities were granted the right to a *free* and *appropriate public education* (FAPE). As a result, an increasing number of children with disabilities began receiving an education through the public school system at the age public education was available in the state, which typically was age five. However, as early as the 1973-74 school year, Illinois and Wisconsin began ensuring FAPE for preschool children, and Michigan ensured FAPE beginning at birth. By the end of the 1970's a total of 15 states ensured FAPE to some or all of the children with disabilities under the age of five[1] (Ad Hoc 619 Work Group, 1995). Forty-one percent of the states and jurisdictions ensured FAPE for all preschool children (age 3 to 5) with disabilities by the 1986-87 school year (Heekin & Ward-Newton, 1995).

On October 8, 1986, Congress enacted, and President Reagan signed into law, P.L. 99-457, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA reauthorized and amended EHA and extended FAPE to children with disabilities ages three to five years old. Also, one major portion of IDEA--Part H, the Infants and Toddlers With Disabilities Program--invited states to expand and improve services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. As of October 1994, all 50 states had committed to seeing that services are available to every eligible child and his or her family.

As a result of federal and state legislation, as well as increased public awareness, more than 586,000 children with disabilities, birth to five years, received services during the 1993-94 school year (Annual Report to Congress, 1995). Although studies have been done on the effects of early childhood special education, including examination of elementary-school outcomes, secondary and post-secondary outcomes could not be examined until recently because early childhood special education only came into existence, on a large scale, two decades ago.

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[1] 1974-75 Alaska and Texas beginning at age 3
1975-76 Iowa beginning at birth
Virginia beginning at age 2
1976-77 Massachusetts, Rhode Island & South Dakota beginning at age 3
1977-78 American Samoa beginning at birth
Louisiana and New Hampshire beginning at age 3
1978-79 Maryland beginning at birth
1979-80 Nebraska beginning at birth

Now that the children who began receiving early childhood special education services in the 1970's are reaching their 20s, and more federal and state money is funneled into services for very young children with disabilities, it is critical to have information about the long-term outcomes for these students. Policy makers and educators alike are requesting such information. Although some retrospective and prospective studies are in progress, there is little direction from policy makers and state education agencies about relevant research questions and important long-term outcomes.

Purpose of Inquiry

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)[2] is exploring the possibility of supporting and/or collaborating on a research endeavor to study the long-term outcomes of students who received special education services under the age of five years. Such a research study might examine service, developmental, medical, and family data from the first five years of life in relation to middle, secondary and post-secondary data (e.g. achievement data, access to the general education curriculum, graduation rate, post-secondary education). NASDSE believes that such a study could lead to a set of parameters that would serve as a model for state assessment of the efficacy of early intervention for children with disabilities. In order to help formulate the research questions for such a study, Project FORUM and National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC*TAS) contacted nine states to inquire about their longitudinal research priorities.

Method

Selection of States

Several states were selected that have served children with disabilities under the age of five years since the 1970's. States were also selected to insure that the sample was diverse in terms of geographic location and population size. The states selected were:

1. Arizona
2. Delaware
3. Florida
4. Indiana
5. Iowa
6. Massachusetts
7. Michigan
8. Texas
9. Utah

---

[2] NASDSE and Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland) have had preliminary discussions regarding collaboration on a research proposal to fund a retrospective study of nearly 600 students who were classified as disabled and began receiving special education services under the age of five years. Extensive data (e.g., services received, developmental status, medical, family, achievement) are available on these students from their infant, toddler, preschool, and early elementary years. The proposed study would examine middle, secondary and post-school data. The oldest of these children are expected to graduate from high school in 1997. NASDSE believes that data obtained from this study will be of benefit to all states.

Data Collection

State directors of special education in the nine selected states were sent a letter in March 1996 explaining the purpose of the inquiry and the proposed areas of research. (See Appendix A) The nine proposed areas of research were as follows:

1. Rate of retention relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

2. Home language and economic situation relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

3. Changes in disability classification over time, including de-classification.

4. Rates of suspension and expulsion relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

5. Rate of graduation relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

6. Post-secondary year status relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

7. Family satisfaction with preschool services/special education support.

8. Mobility rate (movement in/out of school district during elementary and subsequent years) relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

9. Provision of ESOL/ESL services during elementary and secondary years.

State personnel were contacted by telephone subsequent to mailing of the letters to schedule a telephone interview or request written feedback. Data were collected in the spring and summer of 1996. The list of state respondents can be found in Appendix B.

Results

Input regarding the proposed areas of research inquiry was received from the following eight states: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Utah. The state input will be discussed by topic area.

Graduation

The only area of interest to respondents from all eight states was the graduation rate of students who received special education services under the age of five years. Two of the eight states indicated a high interest in graduation rates. One respondent said that these data were of interest, but lower priority than other data. The representative from Florida added that the number of years to graduation, not just graduation rate, was important information.

Post-Secondary Status

Seven states expressed an interest in the post-secondary status of students who received special education services under the age of five years, including information on employment, college enrollment, job training, and living situation. Two of the seven states stated that this type of information was of high interest.

Home Language and Economic Status

Seven states indicated interest in the home language and economic status of the family (as measured by eligibility for free or reduced lunch) of students who received special education services under the age of five years. However, three of these states said this was of lower interest that other areas of research inquiry. The respondent from Arizona indicated that this type of information would be of interest if linked to other demographic information about the student and family.

Retention

Six states were interested in the percentage of students who received special education services under the age of five years who were later retained at one or more grade levels, although two of those states said this was a low interest area.

Changes in Disability Classification

Changes in disability classification and de-classification over time for students who received special education under the age of five years was of interest to six states. For two of those states, this was a high interest area.

Suspension and Expulsion

Six states were interested in rates of suspension and expulsion for students who received special education services under the age of five years. For one state this was a high interest area and for one it was of low interest.

Family Satisfaction

Six states expressed interest in feedback from families regarding their satisfaction with the special education services their child received as a preschooler and at later points in his/her school career. For one state, this was a high interest area. Iowa said that they would also be interested in the student's satisfaction with special education services received.

ESOL/ESL Services

The later receipt of *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) or *English as a Second Language* (ESL) services by students who received special education services under the age of five years was of interest to six states.

Mobility

The proposed area of research inquiry of least interest to states was mobility of the student. Five of the eight states expressed an interest in the movement in/out of districts of the students who received special education services under the age of five years.

Input from the states on the proposed areas of research inquiry is summarized in Table 1.

Additional Areas of Interest

In addition to the proposed areas of research inquiry, several states indicated interest in other types of longitudinal data. Three states wanted achievement data (in reference to the general education curriculum) for students who received special education services under the age of five years. Two states were interested in service data--intensity of special education and related services received, and type and amount of preschool services. One state was interested in more family data (e.g., level of mother, family acceptance of disability, stress level, abuse reports, parent involvement in education); and one state was interested in cost data (cost savings attributable to the provision of early childhood special education).

Table 1
Interest of States in Proposed Areas for Longitudinal Research
(N = 8)

Proposed Areas of Inquiry	Number of States with Interest in this Area
Graduation	8
Post-Secondary Status	7
Home Language and Economic Status	7
Retention	6
Changes in Disability Classification	6
Suspension and Expulsion	6
Family Satisfaction	6
ESOL/ESL	6
Mobility Rate	5

Summary and Conclusion

Interest level was high in all the proposed areas of longitudinal research on children who received early childhood special education services. Sixty-three to 100 percent of the participating states selected each of the nine research areas. The high school graduation rate of students who received special education services under the age of five years was the long-term outcome of most interest to states; mobility rate of these students was of least interest. Three states added that they would be interested in achievement data in reference to the general education curriculum.

With the growing need for data on long-term outcomes for students who receive special education services under the age of five years, it is hoped that this information will help to stimulate prospective and retrospective longitudinal research, and that the perspectives of state-level policy makers in the field of special education will provide valuable guidance for researchers on this topic. As NASDSE moves forward with its support and/or collaboration in this area, information from this inquiry will validate and enrich its efforts.

References

Ad Hoc 619 Work Group for the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council. (1995). *Assisting Our Nation's Preschool Children with Disabilities and Their Families*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC*TAS).

Heekin, S., & Ward-Newton, J. (1995). *Section 619 Profile*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC*TAS).

Appendix A

Letter to State Directors of Special Education

March 22, 1996

FIELD(1)

Dear FIELD(2):

We are writing to request your help in identifying the most important questions related to long-term outcomes for students with disabilities who began receiving special education before they entered kindergarten. The purpose of this request is to support a collaborative research project for which the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Maryland are seeking funding.

NASDSE and MCPS propose a retrospective study to examine middle, secondary and post-school data on up to 600 students who were classified as disabled and began receiving special education services under the age of five years. Extensive data (e.g., services received, developmental, medical, family, achievement) are available on these students from their infant, toddler, preschool, and early elementary years. The oldest of these children are expected to graduate from high school in 1997.

We believe that the data obtained from this study will be of benefit to all states. We hope this study will lead to a set of parameters that might be used as a model for state assessment of the efficacy of early intervention for children with disabilities.

In order to guide our examination, Project FORUM at NASDSE and NEC*TAS at NASDSE are polling selected states that have a history of serving infants and toddlers with disabilities to ask the following question: **If these 600 students had received services in your state, what would you want to know about them now?**

Attached are nine areas of inquiry that might be of value. Please review these areas and be prepared to discuss your priorities with one of us during the **first two weeks of April**. With your input, this proposed research effort will be more responsive to state policy issues related to early childhood special education.

During the course of the research project, NASDSE proposes to convene groups of educators in the field, via conference call, to examine the preliminary data and make recommendations for next steps. When we talk with you by telephone, we will discuss with you your interest in being part of this telephone panel.

Our chances of receiving funding for this study will be greatly increased if we obtain letters of support from state education agencies. We plan to ask you for such a letter when we talk with you next week. We sincerely hope that you will support our research efforts.

Sincerely,

Joy Markowitz
Policy Analyst
Project FORUM at NASDSE

Luzanne Pierce
Senior Program Associate
NEC*TAS at NASDSE

Attachment

Areas of Inquiry

1. Rate of retention relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

2. Home language and economic situation (free or reduced lunch) relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

3. Changes in disability classification over time, including de-classification.

4. Rates of suspension and expulsion relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

5. Rate of graduation relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten. *[Please note, these data will not be available during our proposed one-year feasibility study because the oldest students graduate in 1997.]*

6. Post-secondary year status (e.g., employment, college, job training, living situation) relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten. *[Please note, these data will not be available during our proposed one-year feasibility study because the oldest students graduate in 1997.]*

7. Family satisfaction with preschool services/special education support in retrospect.

8. Mobility rate (movement in/out of school district during elementary and subsequent years) relative to the general student population and population of students who were identified as disabled after they entered kindergarten.

9. Provision of ESOL/ESL services during elementary and secondary years.

Other:

Appendix B

State Education Agency Respondents

State Education Agency Contacts

Arizona

Lynn Busenbark
Preschool Coordinator
State Department of Education

Delaware

Martha Toomey
619 Coordinator
Department of Public Instruction

Florida

Robert M. Connors
Deputy Director
Division of Public Schools

Indiana

Robert Marra
State Director of Special Education

Iowa

Jeananne Hagen
Acting Bureau Chief
Bureau of Special Education

Massachusetts

Carol MacNeill
Early Childhood Specialist
Department of Education

Michigan

Richard Baldwin
State Director of Special Education

Utah

John Killoran
619 Coordinator
Special Education Services Unit